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"In the Heart of a Fool"

The New Novel in Which, by Telling the Story of Grant Adams, William Allen White Sets Forth His Own Big Faith

EVERYTHING about William Allen White is big. He is a big man physically and a bigger morally, mentally and socially, meaning by "socially" his share in the activities of the world, work and play. His new novel, *In the Heart of a Fool*, is to scale. It has 615 pages and 52 chapters; and we would not take away a word from it. To read it may be thought to be a serious enterprise; it is, but not in the way you mean. It's a serious enterprise because the book will profoundly affect the thoughts and the feelings of many who read it, and so will alter their lives.

The purpose of every writer is to influence lives. Some would do it by creating or satisfying the sense of what is beautiful and what is lovely; others by telling those things that are of good report. For what would be the object of writing if it were not to influence anybody, be it ever so slightly? What would be the use? Who would bother to put pen to paper? A man writes an advertisement to sell a pair of shoes that will make you more comfortable, and so better tempered, and so better able to work and easier to live with. And a man writes a novel to sell you an idea that will make you more generous, more tolerant, keener conscience, a better American.

And then people talk about "literary values"! But "literary values" count only so far as they enable you to put over your idea. The values that count are values in life; they are not peculiar to literature at all. A writer may breathe in prose of wonderful charm and most poetic dictum, and his beautiful words are a whisper on the wind; another writer may tell his story badly in poor, old, dented words that have nothing to excuse them but the ring of silver as they strike on the membrane of your ear; and because his crude parable somehow makes a different man of you his book transcends any book you have ever known. It is only of late years, for example, that people have concerned themselves with "literary values" in the Bible; for generation after generation the Bible was valued, not because it is wonderful prose and poetry but because it moulded men's lives.

"The Fool Hath Said in His Heart—"

In the beginning of his novel Mr. White tells you of the problem that confronted him as a novelist—and it is every novelist's problem—namely, whose is this story going to be? "Time was, in its invertebrate period of gestation, when this was to be Amos Adams's story." But as time went on it became evident it could not be merely the story of a hopeful old man who talked with the mighty dead by means of a planchette. Then it seemed as if it would be the story of their boy, Grant Adams, who not only saw visions as a young man, while his father dreamed dreams, but who came to be men's leader. But there was more than Grant Adams to the story, and "there came a time when Amos, alone in his later years, thought that it might be Kenyon's story; for Kenyon now is a fiddler of fame, and fiddlers make grand heroes." Was it, then, to become the story of the town of Harvey? Harvey, after all, is only a symptom. Of Tom Van Dorn, the fool who said in his heart: "There is no God"? Tom Van Dorn bulks very large, to be sure; but the story of a fool never made men wise. "It must be," decides the author, "the story of many men and many women, each one working out his salvation in his own way and all



the threads woven into the divine design, carrying along in its small place on the loom the inscrutable pattern of human destiny. But most of all it should be the story which shall explain the America that rose when her great day came—exultant, triumphant to the great call of an ideal, arose from sordid things environing her body and soul, and consecrated herself without stint or faltering hand to the challenge of democracy."

And so Mr. White wrote of the lives of Amos and Mary Adams, who ran a shabby little newspaper that rallied to "whatever faith or banner or cause seemed surest in its promise of the sunrise." He wrote of their son, Grant, who was to become a laborer and a zealot and the tall figure at the head of thousands of workers. He wrote of Kenyon Adams, who had the gift of music; and of Lila Adams, his mate; and of Tom Van Dorn and Margaret Müller, who built them a temple of love and found them in a living hell; and of the old money making, web spinning spider, Daniel Sands, and of Dr. Nesbit, who bought men and sold them; and of the side whiskered Ahab Wright and Capt. Morton who peddled contraptions; and he wrote of big George Brotherton who spoke as softly as a foghorn tooting a nocturne. He wrote also of Henry Fenn, who had a devil to fight; of Violet Mauling, who became Violet Hogan; of Morty Sands and Laura Nesbit and Bedelia Nesbit who, being a Satterthwaite, always remained one. He wrote and writes of all these people and a considerable more. He does not introduce you to them; he brings you into the midst of them and you live there for the 615 pages, and are not willingly turned away.

The Quality of the Book.

In the Heart of a Fool is not the record of these people's lives, but the record of what those lives tend toward; it doesn't stop with their sayings

and doings, but it tries to show what will come of them; and it measurably succeeds. Behind the chronicle of their times lies the secret of the next fifty years of American history. There was a generation in which materialism seemed sometimes to have swept every other ideal off the boards. There was much to be done. Prairies had to be transformed into cities, and in the process men were sometimes transformed into slaves. For slavery is not a thing of owning men as property, but an effective control of men's hours and activities. No one cares about merely owning another man except for what he can get out of him. And if you can get everything you want out of him there is no need to have a deed of ownership of him recorded in your name.

This Mr. White sees clearly, and this is the thing the generation of which he writes for the most part never saw. He brings this out simply by telling that generation's story. How well he tells it! He is not afraid to flood his story with the emotion he and his people feel. He can write of Margaret Van Dorn's "fair, false face" and he can use worn phrases about young love that "artists" in fiction would shudderingly cast from them; and White can do this just as Charles Dickens could do it and for the same reason. It is a heart that speaks and the words are nothing.

Almost any one, except for the phases of the story which deal with American politics and American industrialism, could sit down and methodically strip the action of this novel to a fleshless skeleton. It is not new that there are unlawful children born in the world. It is not new that there are drunkards. It is not a discovery that the world contains good men like Grant Adams and John Dexter and men, like Dr. Nesbit, in whom good is commingled with a strange moral blindness. There have been geniuses other than Kenyon Adams and there were lovable men before George Brotherton. But he who should attempt to deal with Mr. White's novel in this soulless and mechanistic fashion would prove himself as hopeless a fool as Tom Van Dorn. And he who would heft the book for "literary values" would show himself spiritually under weight. "By their fruits shall ye know them" is as true of books as it is of men; and the fruit of this book will be an awakening of the sleeping consciences in many men, and a glimpse of what it is to live in America to-day.

The Fibre of the Man.

Behind a big book there is always a big man. The son can be greater than the father because he has not only a father but a mother, and four grandparents, and eight great-grandparents—and then some. The building can be bigger than the architect because in its planning and erection other men had a hand, too. Now there are not many big people in Mr. White's story; even Grant Adams had too many visions and too little vision. In fact, without a man of unfailing faith and vision to tell the story this story would have been meaningless. But when you have read it you will go behind the book to the man who wrote it, not to discuss it, not to find fault with it, not even, perhaps, to praise it, but simply to hold out your hand to him. "Shake!"

IN THE HEART OF A FOOL. BY WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE. The Macmillan Company, \$1.50.